

Civilization

Published in Vihangama Vol. V September - October 2002

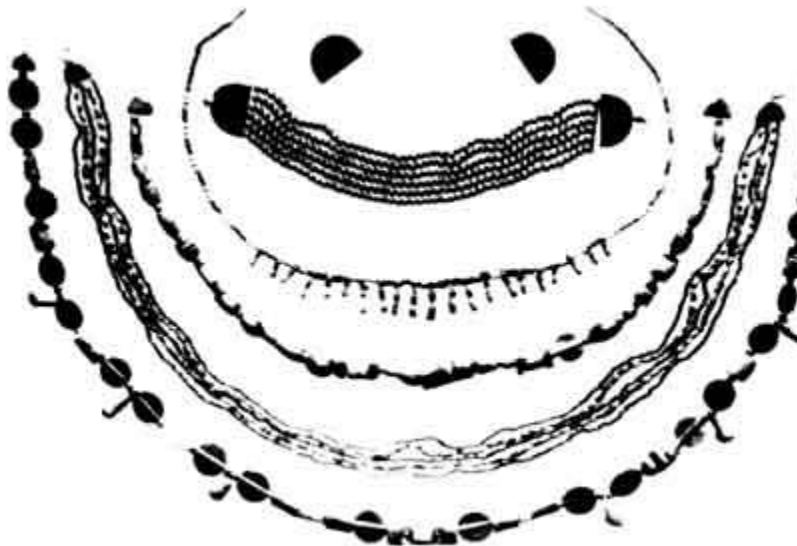
Harappan Civilization: An Analysis in Modern Context

Deep Raj Gupta

(This article puts together in a nutshell the findings on Harappan civilization)

The Harappan Civilization has significance for not only historians and archaeologists but also the common man. Though the first Harappan sites were discovered way back 1920-21, by archaeologists Dr. D.R. Sahni and Dr. R.D. Banerjee (Harappa in Punjab and Mohenjo-Daro in Sind - both in Pakistan now) fresh sites are still being unearthed, adding insight into the rich culture of the Harappan civilization.

Some of the most striking aspects of the discoveries are the town planning and architecture, art and crafts and the social, religious and economic condition of that era. Much has been known about the town planning and architecture of the Harappan civilization. The cities boasted of well-planned roads wide and straight, houses provided with an efficient drainage system and ventilation.



The excavations have yielded a rich collection of objects in stone, bronze and terracotta. One of the most known figurines is perhaps the 'dancing girl' (in bronze) naked but for a necklace and a series of bangles almost covering one arm, her hair dressed in a complicated coiffure, standing in a provocative posture, with one arm on her hip and one lanky leg half bent. This face has an air of lively pertness quite unlike anything in the work of other ancient civilizations. Her thin boyish figure and those of the mother goddesses found here, indicate incidentally, that the ideas of female beauty among the Harappan people were very different from those of later India. It has been suggested that this 'dancing girl' is representative of a class of temple dancers and prostitutes, such as existed in contemporary Middle Eastern civilizations and were an important feature of later Hindu culture, but this cannot be proved. It is not certain that the girl is a dancer much less a temple dancer.

In stone much discussed are two male figures - one is a the torso in red sandstone and the other is the

bust of a bearded man. In the former, the limbs have been made separately and fitted into sockets.

The Harappan people also made rough terracotta statuettes of women, usually naked, but with elaborate head dresses, These are certainly icons of the mother goddess and are so numerous that they seem to have been kept in nearly every home. They are crudely fashioned so historians assume that the Goddess was not favoured by the upper classes who commanded the services of the best craftsmen, but that her effigies were mass produced by humble potters to meet popular demand. In terracotta we also find a few figurines of bearded male with coiled hair, their posture rigidly upright, legs slightly apart, and the arms parallel, to the sides of the body. The repetition of this figure in exactly the same position would suggest that he was a deity. A terracotta mask of a horned deity has also been found.

Archaeologists have discovered thousands of seals with beautiful figures of animals, such as unicorn bull, rhinoceros, tiger, elephant, bison, goat, buffalo etc. The most remarkable seal is Pashupati Seal (size: 1/2" to 2" with square and rectangular shape). From the seals it appears certain that the Indus valley civilization had trade links with Mesopotamia and perhaps merchants from India even visited and stayed there. The standard Harappan seal was a square plaque 2 x 2 sq. inches usually made from the soft river stone steatite. Every seal is engraved in a pictographic script (yet to be deciphered). It appears that the seals were also used as amulets, carried on the persons of their owners, perhaps as modern day identity cards. Some seals have also been found in gold, ivory or blue or white. They all bear a great variety of designs, most often of animals including bull, with or without hump, elephant, tiger, goat and also monsters. Sometimes trees or human figures were also depicted.

The jewelry in gold and silver-bangles, necklaces and other ornaments are well crafted. They are "so well finished and so highly polished that they might have come out of a Bond Street Jeweller's of today rather than from a pre-historic house of thousands years ago" says Marshall. The Harappan people also made brilliantly naturalistic models of animals, specially monkeys and squirrels, used as pin-heads and beads. They also made toys in terracotta with movable heads, monkeys which would slide down a string, little toy carts (one of the oldest example of a wheeled vehicle) and whistles shaped like birds.

Tools of stone, copper and bronze have been found, which in many respects were technologically sound. The blades were flat and easily bent while the axe heads had to be lashed to their shafts. In the design of one tool, however, the Harappans had been superior; they had devised a saw with undulating teeth, which allowed the dust to escape freely from the cut and much simplified the carpenter's craft.

The origin and the race of the Harappan are still a matter of dispute. While one section of scholars believes that they were Dravidian, definitely Indo-Aryan, another section believes that they were the same as Sumerians or the Cretans. The Harappan script has not been deciphered but the discovery of writing material clearly indicates that the Harappans were educated.

The discovery of a large number of spindles of various sizes indicate that threads both of cotton and woolen must have been spun in those days. Spindle whorls made of pottery, shell and faience have been found. From the statues it appears both men and women wore two separate pieces of clothes similar to *dhoti* and shawl (covering lower and upper parts of the body respectively). The 'shawl' covered the left shoulder, passing below the right shoulder. No footwear has survived nor is it shown in any of the figures. Both men and women wore ornaments. While necklaces, fillets, armlets and finger-rings were common to both sexes, women wore girdles, earrings and anklets. Ornaments were made of gold, silver, copper, ivory, precious and semi-precious stones, bones and shells etc. From archaeological findings it appears that the Harappans were conscious of fashion. Different hairstyles and beards were in vogue. Cinnabar was used as a cosmetic and face-paints, lipsticks and collyrium (eye liners) were also known to them.

The main diet consisted of wheat, barley and milk products. Fruits, vegetables, fish and meat were also consumed. Music and dance appear to be the main sources of entertainment.

No temple has yet been discovered. From the Pashupati seal, it is certain that they worshipped Shiva. There is an image of Shiva, seated on a stool flanked by an elephant. Numerous pottery figurines of Mother Goddesses have also been found. Nature worship must have been part of their ritual as revealed in the seals. There is a scene of a horned goddess, before whom another horned deity is kneeling and animals as some male figures wearing the horns of a goat or a bull, some animals standing on rectangular pedestals, composite animals having body of a ram and trunk of an elephant, a limestone bull having a garland round his neck and a unicorn being carried in a procession.

(The author works in Kala Nidhi)

Agriculture was their main occupation. Rainfall in Sind and Punjab was heavy. There is evidence of the cultivation of wheat, barley, peas, mustard, cotton and rice. Domesticated animals were kept in the house. Horse bones have also been discovered at Surkotda, indicating use of the animal.

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